

**EMPOWERMENT CONGRESS MENTAL HEALTH COMMITTEE
HOUSING TOWN HALL FORUM
By M.C. Harris, LACDMH Community Worker**



The planning committee for the 2nd District of Mark Ridley-Thomas and Empowerment Congress decided to host a housing forum on October 19, 2013 that would address the issues and educate the community on a number of specific issues, ranging from homelessness, shared housing, low income and Section 8.

At the beginning of the day, the forum began with an introduction to social community networking, refreshments, and the availability of the nearby resource table. The process procedure would involve educating the relative community, family members and peer consumers.

Los Angeles County Supervisor Mark Ridley-Thomas arrived and gave his opening remarks to the participants on the urgency of this sort of town hall meeting. He also thanked the participants and committee members for their outstanding commitment to host this event.



Maria Funk, Ph.D., District Chief and keynote speaker, gave the audience a presentation on housing options for mental health consumers. She revealed to the community the available data in Service Area 6 shows the community population's homeless areas, location from the chronically homeless individuals, family members, substance abuse, mentally ill, veterans, people with HIV/AIDS, survivors of domestic violence, and those with a physical disability. Dr. Funk went on to explain the overall program project which delivers services to the homeless and low income residences for Supervisorial 2nd District. Individuals could apply for housing through the LACDMH Countywide Housing Employment and Education Resource Development (CHEERD) Program.

There was a breakdown of the services for collaborative shared housing programs and the bridging for saving taxpayers money. Leepi Shimkhada from the Department of Health Services shared health concerns of residence housing. Terry Baker shared how important it is to know that the 2-1-1 phone line is there to help in all types of emergencies and that it may be a point-of-reference for referrals. Peter Lynn of the Housing Authority of Los Angeles County spoke about Section 8 and low income housing. He spoke about some challenges that are involved with housing issues, and answered a few questions from the audience. Reba Stevens, a consulting consumer advocate, shared some of her experiences that she had with housing in the early years of her 14 years of recovery, sobriety and having a child. To say Reba was challenged is an understatement.

The panel of speakers then took written questions from the audience. Afterward, the day ended with a breakout group session and time to review what was discussed from each group. This event made the forum gathering more interesting. The meeting concluded with a raffle drawing with donated gift items.

